



From my perspective

## Preparing for the urban future<sup>☆</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

Every person and every organization plans. But as in eating, dressing, and speaking, some people and some organizations do it better than others. Some do it better in some circumstances than in others. Planning in an urban or metropolitan context is most effective in the mid-range, that is, when tasks of unequivocal importance and necessity must be executed within a fixed period for a clear purpose, on an appropriate schedule, with the money in hand.

Our purpose is to look at the anticipation of the long-term future from the point of view of urban public authority, and how that longer-term future is successfully or less successfully integrated into planning. We take longer term to be 10 to 30 years. The basis for this is a study done in 1985 and commissioned by the Academy for State and Local Government, which is a study group supported by the organizations representing state and local government. We reviewed 30 year 2000 studies dealing with state or local government. In addition, we reviewed and analyzed 150 other papers, reports, and documents dealing with the future of state and local government from 1972 to 1984 I (Hitchcock et al., 1985). The material we examined shaped our organization of the contents and analysis. From the studies and reports, 17 topics more or less obviously fell out, ranging from energy and the environment, to the arts, to tax and finance. A point to note is that as the nation becomes more populous, integrated and homogeneous, the distinctions between city, suburbs, and countryside tend to blur, as do the questions of responsibility and jurisdiction between city, local, metropolitan, county, and state governments. Consequently, while we emphasize the factors influencing the future of the city, the reader should keep in mind that most of these same factors operate at the metropolitan, county, and state levels as well. Let us turn now to our principal findings and then, as a close to the paper, to conclusions about pursuing the systematic view of the future as a planning aid for cities looking to the third millennium.

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### 2. Trends

The principal trends relating to the 17 topics the Year 2000 studies dealt with are listed in Table 1. Most are variations of one of the following ten trends. By recognizing the commonalities among the diverse trends, their implications become easier to understand.

The following are brief descriptions and examples of each of these recurring trends:

1. Steadily rising costs: The costs of housing, energy, administration, materials, health care, and almost all social services are going up. This puts pressure on governments to cut back or become more efficient.
2. More aggressive demands for resources: Despite rising costs, most people see growing demands for natural and physical resources—land, energy, minerals, water, housing, infrastructure, recreational facilities, and forests. The development, management, and protection of these resources will be a growing concern of state and local governments.
3. Citizen's growing demands for services: People also want more services such as day care, welfare, Medicaid, health care, adult education, arts, recreational programs, police, and fire protection. Since many of these are public services, the demands will be strongly felt in many city halls, county seats, and state capitols.
4. Declining and vacillating federal support: Since the Great Depression, the national government has become involved in many aspects of state and local life. With pressures to reduce the federal deficit and strengthen defense, that longterm trend is reversing. Federal support is declining across the board from arts to transportation. This change means that state and especially local governments will have to be increasingly self-reliant in terms of revenue generation, program development, and implementation.
5. More state and local innovation: In response to growing physical, natural, and human resources demands, state and local governments have been enhancing their abilities to manage many different types of activities including energy research and development, revenue diversification, auditing and budgeting, planning, and the use of information technologies. This trend will continue as more people demand more services from these governments.
6. An aging, growing, more diverse population: The growing numbers of elderly and minorities will add to the concerns of state and local governments in terms of housing, health care, transportation,

**Table 1**  
Trends shaping urban affairs and government.

Energy	Rising energy costs Shift from oil and gas to alternative sources Increased use of conservation Growing energy demand (South/West) Continued integration into global energy markets
Environment	Evolving state and local management capability Continued concern for environmental protection More groundwater contamination Increased hazardous wastes concerns More solid wastes Continued pollution of surface waters Declining air quality
Natural resources	Increased consumption of natural resources Growing demand for water resources More mineral exploitation Growing demand for forest products
Agriculture	Integration into the global economy Industrialization of agriculture Concentration of farms Loss of cropland Loss of topsoil
Housing	Growing demand for housing owner and rental Rising costs of housing Demand exceeds supply of affordable housing Movement to rehabilitation Rising number of planned communities Introduction of new technologies into old and new buildings
Land use and planning	Continued urbanization Expanding metropolitan areas Changing role of center cities Continued movement to rural areas Growing demand for recreation facilities
Transportation	Continued dominance of the automobile Growing public transportation ridership (South/West) No significant change in transportation technology Growing public transportation deficits Increasing congestion in growth areas
Infrastructure	More bridge and road repairs More railroad track abandonment Need to upgrade water systems Emerging demand for information infrastructure More state and local financing innovations
Health	Rising health care costs Increasing demand for health care, especially among the elderly
Human resources-population	Slower, uneven population growth Aging of the population More Hispanics Continued concentration of minorities in cities
Human resources-services	Decline in federal support for social programs Increased demand for day care More crime Growing importance of volunteerism
General government and organization	Increased state and local responsibility More citizen involvement Growing tension among state and local governments Cooperation and competition among public and private sectors
Government management	Increased importance of planning Greater demand for accountability Slowing rate of growth of governments Growing role of information technology
Education and training	Changing enrollment patterns More adult education Declining federal funding More alternative educational methods Increasing job retraining efforts More teachers' unions
Arts	Increasing interest in the arts Declining federal government funding
Tax and finance	Increasing service demands Decreasing federal aid Continued borrowing difficulties Increased state and local financial burden More revenue diversification

**Table 1** (continued)

Economic development	Economic growth primarily in the South and West More jobs but continued unemployment Growing tourism industry Movement to a service economy
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education, and social services. These problems will be most acute in the nation's cities. Some areas such as northeastern central cities may lose population. But the general trend is growth. This will bring demands for new services and facilities.

- The rise of the South and West and the decline of the North and East: Population growth, economic development, immigration, natural resource consumption, transportation demands, housing demand, and environmental contamination will grow fastest in the states of the South and West, especially Florida, Texas, Arizona, California, Colorado, and Nevada.
- A cascade of infrastructure and environmental problems: The physical plant and the environment of the states and localities of the United States will continue to deteriorate. Money for repairing bridges, water systems, railroad tracks, and mass transit will be hard to find. Economic development will work against efforts to keep open spaces, protect groundwater, or improve air quality. People will still want a better environment and infrastructure.
- Change and disruption from the introduction of new technologies: Information technologies-computers, telecommunications, robotics, and the like-will further the shift to a service-based economy. Materials sciences and biological technologies will alter the way even farming and construction are done. These same technologies hold the promise of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of many aspects of state and local government.
- Integration of the global and US economy: In several areas such as energy, manufacturing, and agriculture, the integration of local economies into the international economy can create severe dislocations-such as lost jobs and declining wages. This global integration also means that more of the decisions that affect the economic health of localities are intrinsically outside of their control.

### 3. Issues

The issues facing state and local governments in the future are listed in [Table 2](#). Out of these issues come eight recurring conflicts or issues which, although local in origin, may take on national prominence in the future.

- Development vs. environmental protection: Perhaps the most commonly cited and most troublesome issue for state and local governments is balancing the undesirable effects of growth such as traffic congestion, farmland conversions, and water pollution against the jobs, small business opportunities, and the increased tax base growth brings.
- Federal vs. state and local responsibilities: With declining federal support, there is increased questioning of the role of the federal government in the management of many state and local problems such as energy, agriculture, transportation, social services, infrastructure, and housing.
- The elderly, poor, and minorities vs. other priorities: One of the ironies of the future is that as the number of elderly and minorities grows, the resources to meet their needs will decline. In areas such as transportation, housing, health care, social services, urbanization, and economic development there will be recurrent disputes over the role of state and local governments in meeting the needs of the less fortunate.
- Who pays vs. who gains: The issue of who gains and who loses will rise in importance as states and localities are forced to make difficult choices between the competing needs of different groups. Issues such as comparable worth, taxation, the effects of industrialization

**Table 2**  
Emerging issues for state and local governments.

Energy	Balanced energy development The role of the federal government Need for multistate regulation Meeting the energy needs of the poor
Environment	Increasing environmental protection Conflict between development and protection Fairly meeting the needs of small and rural communities
Natural resources	Conflict among uses of natural resources Public management and regulation of resources
Agriculture	Impacts of industrialization State initiatives to protect farmers Federal agricultural policy
Housing	Growing disparity in housing quality between rich and poor Emerging conflicts over tenants' rights Public vs. private responsibilities for housing supply Housing abandonment in central cities
Land use and planning	Conflict over land uses Controlling growth Providing services for the poor
Transportation	Federal subsidies for public transportation Intersuburban public transportation Intermodal coordination Restrictions on automobile use
Infrastructure	Effects of federal policies Allocation of financial resources
Health	Limited access to health care services Health care efficiency
Human resources-population	Managing the effects of growth Meeting the needs of the elderly Language
Human resources-services	Reducing fragmentation in social services administration Regulating day care Reducing crime
General government and organization	Reducing fragmentation of government Improving citizen access Enhancing state and local capacities
Government management	Comparable worth Need for efficiency
Education and training	Educational deficiencies Insufficient funding
Arts	Adequate financial support Effective coordination of support
Tax and finance	Implications for economic development Equity
Economic development	Balancing economic growth with environmental protection Displaced workers and distressed communities Fostering small businesses

of agriculture, and access to health care will plague state and local governments for the next decade.

5. Efficiency vs. expanding demands: Declining budgets and increasing demands will drive increased attention to the efficiency of government operations, health care delivery, social service delivery, and repair and maintenance of infrastructure.
6. Integration vs. local control: Part of the drive for efficiency will be growing interest in integrating the functions of government to achieve economies of scale. In some cases this may mean proposals for regional governments. However, attempts to integrate transportation, the arts, social services, and other aspects of government organization will run up against increased demands for local control and citizen access to decisions that affect them.
7. Regulation vs. deregulation: Despite the apparent trend toward deregulation, the state and local governments will continue to face demands for and conflicts around regulation of activities such as day care, automobile use, resource exploitation, land use, electric utilities, and overall growth.

8. Continuing problems vs. new problems: The states and local governments will continue to face difficult issues such as reducing crime, improving the quality of education, housing abandonment in central cities, conflicts over land use, and finding enough funds to pay for the services and facilities the citizens want.

#### 4. Neglected trends and issues in the futures literature

The Year 2000 studies and professional literature on the future of state and local governments tended to overlook several areas important to the future. The following are brief synopses of the types of trends and issues we saw that received little, distorted, or no attention. They are all likely to be important in urban areas.

1. National systems in a local setting: Growing air traffic, international freight traffic, and the future of nuclear power are examples of national techno-economic systems whose operations have significant effects on urban and local economies and societies
2. Newly emerging environmental problems: There is a set of emerging environmental problems including many that affect the great outdoors such as declining rangeland quality, wildlife protection, wetlands degradation, and fisheries management. But others such as indoor air pollution are almost exclusively urban.
3. Opportunities for innovation: There are many opportunities for innovation. Lotteries, alternative work schedules, vocational education, and new housing arrangements are a few examples of innovations that could be used to manage some of the more troublesome issues facing the states and localities.
4. The needs of the elderly, poor, and minorities: The problems of the elderly, minorities, and poor go beyond the few issues noted in the literature to include minority unemployment, the problems of migrant workers, the need for programs to deal with hunger and homelessness, and the continuing need for publicly subsidized housing.
5. Implications of technology: Technologies such as biotechnology, computers, manufactured housing, and health care technologies can and will have pervasive effects on many issues of concern to state and local governments from internal management to environmental protection.

#### 5. Some general conclusions

The various study groups doing the Year 2000 studies had a clear, sharp view of the trees but proved weak in seeing either the leaves or the forest, that is, in seeing the micro or the long-term macro factors. The mid-range of issues concerned with housing, education, and welfare were clear and well understood, although not necessarily effectively engaged from a public policy point of view. This situation nicely illustrates an observation of Daniel Bell, the Harvard futurist and sociologist, to the effect that government is too big for the small problems of our society and too small for the big problems.

A second and perhaps crippling feature of most of these studies was that whether done by booster groups, that is, ad hoc citizens' organizations, or done under the sponsorship of the public bureaucracy, the Year 2000 studies almost totally failed to effectively engage the absolute core issue for the future of the city, namely, the long-term economic base of the community. This allergy to reality has not substantially improved in the past 20 years.

The various studies also tended to be weak in their embrace of unequivocally bad news-weak to the point of rejecting knowledge. This shows up in a variety of ways, for example, in the relative neglect of the patently growing importance of water contamination, particularly in those cities fed by groundwater. On the other extreme is the resistance to anticipatory change dealing with the structural reorganization of metropolitan areas, the growth of suburbs and of supercounties, the aging of the baby boomers, the

internationalization of local economies, and the differential affluence and poverty of various districts of the city itself and its suburbs. These and similar factors tended to be ignored in planning for the future.

There also tended to be a broad rejection of the futurist model for thinking. Whether this was conscious, which was unlikely, or out of ignorance, which is more likely, it is reflected in an amateurishness running through most of the Year 2000 studies and a narrow perspective in most of the professional papers. In most cases, these future studies were conducted on the basis of volunteer or recruited prominent citizens or their designated appointees being responsible for the work. In few cases was there an attempt to locate people with experience and professional skill in exploring the future to help define an effective project.

The neglect of the futurists' perspective leads to an overbalanced emphasis on continuity and a turning away from the potential for discontinuities or radical change. This shows up most clearly in the technological areas, where the dealing with infrastructure issues tends to be framed around financing and a relatively short-term (5 and 10 year strategies) with little attention to the long-term structural changes in the community and even less attention to the possibilities for radical changes in infrastructure technology.

The emphasis on continuity shows up in the almost total neglect of the concept of the wired city, and ignorance of such factors as the

mass networking of America through fiber optics, or in terms of the older studies, what would have been its functional equivalent, cable.

There was almost no carryover from one study to the next, hence, the opportunity was consistently lost for buildup in sophistication, technique, and the opportunity to get a running start on a particular Year 2000 study. The studies also failed to provide for mechanisms to monitor consequences of their own work and to provide or propose mechanisms for follow-through. There is therefore no assurance that the study groups' efforts would be of any avail. Finally, to the best of our knowledge, no significant publication in public administration, government, political science, or public affairs made a point of reporting on these studies to give them broader ventilation. This would have helped to advance the collective enterprise. The irony of these studies is that even when problems were earmarked as long as 20 years ago, little visible and almost no significant action was taken to prepare for yesterday's tomorrow, that is, for today.

### Reference

- Hitchcock, I., H. H. Gates, J.F., 1985. *The Future of State and Local Government as Seen in the Futures Literature*. J.F. Gates, Inc., Washington, DC.